No. 6

The Lesson of the Pestilence.

A DISCOURSE

PREACHED IN THE

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, NORFOLK, Va.

ON

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BY

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DISCOURSE.

"He," (the Father of spirits, chasteneth us,) "for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness."—Heb. xii: 10.

About four months have elapsed since, as a congregation, we began to be scattered. To-day, through God's good providence, we meet in full assembly again, in this, our accustomed place of worship. Four months! How short a period when measured by the ordinary rules for measuring time! Often has one been absent from us for a longer time than this, and yet, on his return, has found all things continuing so much as they were, that neither he that had gone, nor he that remained, had aught of interest to tell the other. It is not so now. The four months last passed have been four long months to us, measure them as we will. This *summer of the pestilence* has burned in its record upon the memory of every one of us.

To those who were away, these four months have been long months of harassing anxiety; anxiety which no kindness, no sympathy of those among whom you were temporary sojourners could alleviate; anxiety about known and loved ones left behind, about friends and neighbors, those with whom you associated in the business of the world, those whom you were accustomed to meet in the intimacies of social life, those with whom you had walked to the house of God in company. With painful interest you watched from day to day for the private letter, or turned to the public prints, that you might there read the list of the sick and the dead in our plague-stricken city. And when in the former you read a name you had honored or loved, with eager haste you sought the next day's paper, and yet, hardly dared to open it, fearing there to read that name repeated among the fallen—a transfer which the deadly character of the pestilence rendered

strangely familiar. Four long months of painful anxiety have they been to you. And their record is blotted with many a tear.

To those who remained, and who yet are numbered with the living, these four months have been long months of painful trial; and in many an instance, of labor and of suffering. In the record left upon the memory there is noted, first, a period of apprehension, as the pestilence was seen, day by day, widening its range, and darkling o'er us in its terrible might; days spent in ministering to the sick and helping to bury the dead, often succeeded by nights of broken slumbers—broken through sympathy with sufferings we could not alleviate; then, a period when we too were numbered among the sick, (for it is only here and there that one is to be found who escaped the fever altogether,) a period of which we know but little, save that it was a time of burning thirst, of irresistible nervous restlessness, of feverish anxiety; and then, in almost every instance, there is the remembrance of a dark hour of family affliction—the hour of parting with loved ones, when at the bedside we sat troubled watchers, and the heart, though it would not, it dared not, question either the wisdom or the grace of God, yet, in its anguish, sent up the cry, "Would God I might die for thee."

In the four months last passed, there has been crowded the incidents of years. And so thick and fast have the changes come upon us, that the mind can hardly yet take them in as a reality. How aptly descriptive of the pestilence from which we have suffered the phrase of Holy Writ, "the overflowing scourge"! Yes; as the swollen, overflowing torrent, which has o'ertopped its banks, and in its headlong might sweeps onward, often, in one short hour, obliterating every trace of the labor of years, so has this pestilence swept o'er us; and the mind can yet hardly realize the changes it has wrought.

I suppose I speak but the experience of many an one, when I say, that the crowded history of the past few months seems, at times, more like a dream than a reality; and we almost await the hour of awaking, when these shadowy, troublous visions of the night shall pass away. But no, it is not a dream. The evidences of its reality crowd upon us whichsoever way we turn. When gathered, as we are this day, in the house of God, the sight of almost every family clad in the habiliments of mourning; the

the vacant seats—now vacant, but a little while ago occupied, from Sabbath to Sabbath, by those who shall no more worship with us here on earth—tell us it is not a dream. And when we go from God's house to our homes, the vacant seats by the table and the fireside, and the lack of loved voices, long familiar to the ear, ever witness, it is not a dream. And even in the silent hours of the night—those waking hours, which the pestilence has left us as a part of its terrible legacy, when the eye is accustomed to expect no sight, and the ear no sound, and the access of every witness from without is barred—even then, the scarred heart, in its troubled throbbings, feels it is not a dream. No, it is not a dream. The "overflowing scourge" has swept o'er us.

When the fearful alternative was presented to David, for his sins, of a choice between "seven years of famine," and "three months of flight before his enemies," and "three days of pestilence in the land," in choosing the latter, his language is: "Let us fall now into the *hands of the Lord*, for his mercies are great; and let us not fall into the hands of man." And thus he speaks, not because David did not regard famine and war as a part of God's providence, but in the pestilence, the mysterious, the terrible pestilence, "the pestilence that walketh in darkness, the destruction that wasteth at noon-day," the soul instinctively acknowledges the presence of an agent, fresh from before the eternal throne.

"*The pestilence which walketh in darkness!*" No words will more fitly describe the pestilence which has wasted our city, than these words of David. The pestilence! Why did it come among us? and whence came it?

Some have said, its coming is to be traced to the filthy condition of our city during the early months of the summer; and I have read, in papers published at a distance, of numbers of new wharves, and a long causeway, all filled in with rotting wood and mud from the river bottom, and to these has the fever been traced as its origin. Speaking among you who best know the facts in the case, I say, our city is one of the cleanest, best paved cities on the whole Atlantic seaboard; and during the early summer, its streets and alleys were as clean as usual. Of the long causeway, I know nothing; and whilst a large new wharf has been in

process of construction, that wharf is in the very opposite part of the city from that in which the fever first began to prevail. And further: In the neighboring town of Portsmouth, where the fever was as fatal as with us, no new wharf, that I know of, has been filled in for years. 'Tis true, the fever first located itself, and was most fatal in the lowest, most crowded, most uncleanly portions of the city; and, no doubt, the filth and crowded condition of those portions of the city aggravated the disease; but further than this, facts will not authorize us to go. The fever extended its ravages to every part of the city, and even into the surrounding country; and in all parts, if not equally, it was terribly fatal. From that which has always been regarded the healthiest portion of the city, but partially built up as yet, where there are no wharves, and no filth has been suffered to accumulate, I have accompanied to the cemetery, from one house, two corpses, side by side, in the same hearse.

Others have said, we are to trace the fever, in its origin, to that ill-fated steamer, the Ben Franklin, which in the early summer, was smuggled into our harbor, laden with its freight of death. But of this there is no certainty. It has been asserted by eminent physicians, that the first cases of the fever in Norfolk could not be traced to that vessel, and the one that seemed to be its radiating point in the city occurred in a person who had been bed-ridden for six months, and if not actually before the arrival of the steamer at Gosport, at least, so soon after, as not to be traceable to that vessel. No doubt, the poisoned air, the fatal miasm, let loose when the hold of that steamer was broken up, aggravated the disease in that one locality, and for a time at least, rendered it more fatal—but further than this, I do not think the known facts in the case, will authorize us to go. For one, I do not believe the pestilence came passenger in any barque built by mortal hands.

In the present state of human science we know this pestilence but as "pestilence which walketh in darkness." As with respect to the cholera, which has girdled the earth, and scored its track among the nations with its breath of fire, the questions—why, and whence came it? and whither has it gone? are questions which God alone can answer; so with this terrible epidemic.

Appearing in Rio five years ago, its march has been onward. God, who directeth its course, alone knoweth whither its steps are tending. All that man knoweth is, that its track is everywhere rough with new-made graves, and wet with tears.

But 'tis not alone in its origin that this pestilence appears mysterious. Its credentials as God's messenger may be read with equal distinctness in the mysterious character of the disease itself. Like to the ordinary yellow fever, it was in some of its features, perhaps a professional man would say, and say truly, like to it in its characteristic features; and therefore, to be regarded as that disease in its malignant, epidemic form. This may be, probably is, all true. And yet, this fever, in many a case and in some of its features, seemed most unlike the ordinary yellow fever, and in different cases, most unlike itself: and certain it is, that the most skillful physicians, and those of largest and longest experience in its treatment, often found themselves utterly at fault. I have seen those sick with this fever, raving maniacs, so that in their unnatural strength they could hardly be held, and have heard them, in their terrible agony uttering unearthly screams, such as put a spell even upon the spirit of the fierce watch-dog which guarded their dwelling. Blessed be God, such cases were few. And again, I have seen them sick unto death, where they have told me that they suffered not at all, where the mind was as clear as in hours of perfect health, and to the eye, no symptom of disease presented itself save a nervous tremor pervading the body: and yet again, there were cases, in which, from the very inception of the disease, the patient was in a profound stupor, broken it may be, to return again and continue until death closed the struggle. And it would be hard to tell, in which of all its various forms, the fever was most fatal.

There were cases, in which the remedies resorted to, seemed at once to check the progress of the disease, and in a few days the sick man was well again: whilst in other cases, in which the attack seemed no more violent, and medicines seemed all to produce the immediate effect designed, the disease with steady tread, moved right onward to its fatal consummation. Nor is it possible to assign satisfactory reasons for this difference. 'Tis true, that intemperate habits of life aggravated the disease; and very few intemperate persons, once attacked, ever recovered. 'Tis

true also, that excessive fear seemed to render its subject more liable to attack, and the attack more fatal. But, at the same time, it is true, that some of our best and noblest-hearted citizen have fallen—persons of good constitution; of strictly temperate habits; imprudent, in so far as man could see, in nothing; and of whom, it would be a slander upon the dead, to say that they yielded to unreasonable fear. There was no age—there was no station in life—there was no condition of bodily health—there was no care of friends—there was no skill of the physician, which could effectually shield against the aimed arrow of the destroyer, or draw its barbed point when once it had struck its victim. Whilst the epidemic was yet raging, a physician, second to none in his profession, said to me, "I never felt so powerless in the presence of any disease, as in the presence of this; God's hand is upon us." And this was just the conclusion to which every ingenuous, thinking person among us had then come.

God's immediate providence in this epidemic is instinctively acknowleged by the soul, not alone in the mysterious origin and nature of the disease, but also in its terrible might. 'Twas "*the destruction* which *wasteth*, WASTETH, at noon-day," as well as "the pestilence which walketh in darkness."

For several weeks after it first appeared in our city, the progress of the fever seemed to be but slow; and once or twice we were almost ready to hope that it had been checked altogether. Up to the time of the chill north-easterly storm which occurred during the last week in August, although the disease had been spreading for more than a month, there were not, I suppose, over three hundred sick in the city. During that storm and the day succeeding it, not less than a thousand new cases were added to this number. After the storm had passed, in going around among the families of our congregation, I witnessed such scenes as, I pray God, I may never be called to witness again. Some house-holds were all sick, with not a single well one left to wait upon them. Other houses had been literally converted into hospitals, and although there were some of the family, in each instance, who had thus far escaped, yet were they hardly enough to attend upon the sick. In portions of the city there were the sick, the dying and the dead in almost every house, not deserted

of its inhabitants. During the week succeeding, commencing with Sabbath, the 2nd of September, the pestilence raged with its greatest violence. 'Twas then, the plague-fly, a strange insect, of which none can tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth; but whose appearance is said to make the crisis of the epidemic, was in all our dwellings. On that Sabbath, and the days immediately succeeding, I speak advisedly when I say, no man will ever know the number of deaths that occurred in our city. This, however, I know, that from among the communicants of this church, there were more deaths on that Sabbath day, than the average yearly number of deaths, since I have been its pastor; and on that Sabbath and the Monday and Tuesday following, more deaths than during any one year of which I can find a note among the records of the church; and this, although two-thirds of our members were then away and beyond the range of the deadly epidemic. And now, that the pestilence has passed, as nearly as I can tell, our church stands, as to numbers, about where it did ten years ago—not altogether, but yet in large part, owing to the fearful ravages of the fever. In the space of a few weeks, God's own hand crumbled down the building of years. And throughout the city at large, the ravages of the pestilence were, I believe, even greater than among the communicants of our church.

During the first part of September, so great was the number of deaths, daily, that all the ordinary forms of burial had to be dispensed with. In those instances, in which a clergyman and a few friends could accompany the corpse to the cemetery, and this was the case with but a small part of the whole number that died, it was at a rapid gait we were driven thither, and after a brief prayer, the coffin was deposited, more frequently than otherwise, not in the grave, but at the spot where the grave was to be dug, and there left, to take its turn, for burial, at the hands of the overtasked grave-diggers. Our grave-yard, at that season of the year, usually so green, so quiet, so solitary, so fit a cemetery, a resting place for the dead, was then the busiest spot about our city; its avenues, the only dusty avenues to be found; its green sod, so broken every where, that God's acre wore the appearance of a ploughed field. On Wednesday, the 5th of September, I had occasion to go to the potter's-field in the after-

noon, and I there saw coffins and rough boxes, such as necessity compelled us, in many an instance, to substitute for coffins, lying in two separate places, piled up like cord wood, as high as a man could easily reach to pile them, all awaiting a place in the pits which were then being dug to receive them; and this I saw, after seeing in the old cemetery, through which I had passed on my way to the potter's-field, I know not how many coffins awaiting burial. I did not myself see any burial without, a box, at the least, surrounding the body; but that there were corpses thus buried, in one instance, eight in a single night, I have from the lips of one who helped with his own hands to bury them. And all this, not because our people are more careless about a proper respect for the dead than others; in this particular, I believe that the citizens of Norfolk will compare favorably with those of any city in our land. No. It was a terrible necessity which compelled us to the course we took. We buried them thus, because thus only could we keep pace with Death in his rapid strides. We buried them thus, because in this way only could the tainted air be kept from becoming so poisoned that our city would be left without inhabitant.

It did seem, during those fatal weeks, as if we were realizing the fulfillment of the Apocalyptic vision: "And I looked, and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud one sat like unto the son of man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle. And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to him that sat on the cloud, thrust in thy sickle, and reap, for the time is come for thee to reap; for the harvest of the earth is ripe. And he that sat on the cloud thrust in his sickle on the earth; and the earth was reaped. And another angel came out of the temple which is in heaven, he also having a sharp sickle. And another angel came out from the altar, which had power over fire; and cried with a loud cry to him that had the sharp sickle, saying, thrust in thy sharp sickle, and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth, and cast it into the great wine-press of the wrath of God. And the wine-press was trodden without the city, and blood came out of the wine-press, even unto the horse-bridles, by the space of a thousand and six hundred furlongs." Rev. xiv: 14–20.

These are some of the darker shades in the history of the

summer of the pestilence. Blessed be God, there was mercy mingled with his judgments; and in the midst of our sore rebuke and sharp chastisement, our God must be acknowledged as one "who knoweth our frame, who remembereth that we are dust." As with the natural sun, which tinges even the darkest cloud that comes in between it and earth, with enough of its own glory to witness, both that it yet is, and that it is in its nature, light; so with the God of providence, although clouds and darkness may be around about him, yet is there so much of grace mingled with his judgments, that even that darkness is made to bear testimony that "the Lord is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works."

There was mercy mingled with God's judgments. That mercy appeared in the slow progress which the pestilence was permitted to make, for the first month of its existence among us. As already remarked, so slow was this progress, that once or twice we had almost begun to hope that it was checked altogether; and it was not until the last week in August, that it burst upon us in its terrible might. It is altogether owing to this, that so large a portion of our population were enabled to escape from the city; and now, through God's good providence, are here, living men and women, this day. After the last of August, there were very few that went away, not because all desire to escape had ceased to be felt, but in many an instance, because there were sick in the family, and those yet well could not leave the sick. Had the cold storm, of which mention has already been made, with all its consequences, occurred at an earlier stage in the epidemic; when our people were yet at home, and no time had been given for physicians and nurses from abroad to reach us, the heart shrinks from attempting to conceive of the wide-spread desolation which must have ensued.

God's mercy appears in the prevalence of the panic, under the influence of which so many of our citizens fled the city. We can often get a more correct knowledge of a way by which we have travelled, in the retrospect, than we can by observations made as we passed along; so is it in many an instance with our judgment of God's providence. And as I look back over the incidents of the past summer, I cannot but regard that panic as like to "the noise of a great host," which the Lord made the Syrian army to

hear when encamped before Samaria—a providence by which he scattered our people that they might be saved. The quarantine regulations adopted by many of the towns and cities, and even counties, to which our citizens would naturally turn as places of refuge, together with the reports which prevailed from day to day, that each trip of the boats plying to and from our city would be their last, had much more to do in leading our people to flee, than any threatening aspect of the fever among us. It was not so much present danger from the pestilence, or danger distinctly apprehended from that source, as it was the idea that we were being shut in to grapple with it, be it what it might; that unless the then present opportunity of escape were improved, we would be walled in, with no way of egress, even though our city should become one vast charnel-house. This it was, which caused so many to flee during the earlier stages of the epidemic, whilst flight was yet possible. I have spoken of this as a part of God's providence; I have spoken of it thus, the more confidently, because, when the time of real trial came, this wall around us was prostrated as by the breath of some mighty one. And the cities which had been first to shut us out, now threw wide open their homes and their hearts to us, saying come—come if you must even with the fever on you—but by all means come. Who but He that holdeth all hearts in his hand, could have wrought this change?

There was mercy, too, in the sympathy awakened for us, throughout the length and breadth of our land. Besides the abundant evidence of such sympathy, which the records of the Howard Association will furnish, I myself received many a letter expressing the warmest interest, assuring me that our stricken city was not forgotten in the prayers of God's people, and enclosing generous aid for the afflicted; and this from brethren in distant States; brethren whose faces I have never seen, and never expect to see on earth, and who could know nothing of us, excepting that we were their brethren, and in deepest affliction. Had famine come, and but for this generous aid from abroad, I see not what could have prevented its coming, and adding its ravages to those of the pestilence, few would have been left to tell the sad story of our sufferings.

And let us not forget God's mercy, as it appeared in the

timely coming of so many skillful physicians and excellent nurses from abroad, to help us in our season of sorest extremity. You have seen a person when overwhelming misfortune has suddenly come upon him; although all is not lost, and there is hope, if he will but put forth his strength, yet standing still, bewildered. Such seemed to be the condition of our people when the pestilence burst upon us in its might. It was just at this juncture physicians and nurses from abroad began to come to our relief; and their coming was a blessing to us, not only in the aid they rendered us directly, but also in the renewed hope and confidence their coming awakened in our hearts. Had you stood, as I did on one occasion, at the door of a house in which all were down with the fever, and hailing a physician passing, had begged him at least, to come in and prescribe for the sick; and received for answer, "I have already so many cases on hand, that I cannot honestly, conscientiously, undertake another"—an answer which you were constrained to acknowledge to be a righteous answer—you would then feel that our's was indeed a case of extremity. And at how great risk these physicians from abroad came among us, the score that lie buried in our cemetery this day bear witness. Honor, lasting honor, to those who so generously came to our aid. And thanksgiving to Him, mightier than they, whose hand guided them hither.

But some may ask, ought we to regard this pestilence as sent of God, when so many of God's own people were its victims? Is it not true, that many of those who bore the name of Christ, and whose lives were witness that they bore it not unworthily, are among the fallen? And not only so—but is it not true, that in many an instance it was just their faithful discharge of christian duty which was the immediate cause of their death? Was it not because the pastor would not forsake his suffering flock—the parent would not leave the sick-bed of the child—the wife would not turn from the husband—the sister would minister to the sister—the christian would carry, at the least, a cup of cold water to the sick, for Jesus' sake; that the pastor, the parent, the wife, the sister, the follower of Jesus, are now numbered with the dead? To all these questions, the only answer which can with truth be given, is, yes—it is even so. I cannot speak so particularly of other churches; but of our own, it is true, that

some of the brightest, loveliest christians among us, the pestilence has numbered with the dead; some at whose feet we loved to sit and ask their counsel—some, whose prayers and sympathy made us feel strong in the prosecution of every good work—some, whose holy life was ever a sufficient answer to the sneer of the infidel, "what do these christians more than others?" They have been taken away, to meet with us no more on earth. In view of such facts as these, I have heard the question asked, What becomes of God's justice, when the very discharge of duty is the immediate cause of death? When his disciples fall because they will visit the sick, for Jesus' sake? When his own ministers fall, because they will not desert his altar?

And is death necessarily and always an evil? To die, is it to all the great misfortune? If so, what meaneth an Apostle when he writes: "For I am in a strait betwixt two, *having a desire to depart and be with Christ; which is far better.* For to me, to live is Christ, and *to die is gain.*" Or come with me to the bedside of one of God's people, who, but a little while ago, was accustomed to meet with us here from Sabbath to Sabbath. His life is fast ebbing away, and yet his reason is as clear as in hours of perfect health. A friend sits by his bedside, and to quiet the nervous restlessness from which he suffered, that restlessness which is characteristic of the fever, she commences repeating the 23d Psalm: "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake," and then hesitating a moment—the dying man takes up the sacred strain, and the last connected words he utters are: "Yea, though I walk through the valley and the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me." Think you, that death was to him an evil? Or come with me to the bedside of another. Long a devoted servant of Christ has she been, and yet often troubled, especially because conscious of an unwillingness to die. On mentioning this to her pastor, some twelve months before, he had reminded her of that precious promise, that great principle of the christian life: "as thy day, so shall thy strength be." She is about to die; the fatal symptoms have appeared in her case, and no one understands them

better than she. Reminding her pastor of their conversation a year ago, she says: "I wish to bear my testimony to the faithfulness of God. He has not forsaken me; He is with me; all is peace, sweet peace, perfect peace." Think you, that death was to such an one an evil? Come with me, yet again. A mother lies here awaiting her release. She has taken leave of her little ones, and her last charge to them has been, that when they think of her in coming years, they think of her, not as their mother in the grave, but their mother with Christ in heaven. A friend has said to her, it will be pleasant to meet again with those of your children who have been taken before you, to "our Father's house." Yes, she replies, that meeting will be pleasant; but the prospect is to me now a far more pleasant one, that I shall there see Jesus as he is, and love him as I ought. Have you ever known the christian's conflict with the corruption of his own deceitful and desperately wicked heart? that conflict, which wrung from the lips of an Apostle the cry: "O wretched man man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" That knowledge, and that only, can unfold fully the meaning of that dying mother's words: "the prospect is to me now a far more pleasant one, that I shall there see Jesus as he is, and love him as I ought."

Life—death; the life, the death of the christian, what are they? and what is the relation in which they stand the one to the other? "Let not your heart be troubled," said the blessed Jesus. "In my Father's house are many mansions: I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself: that where I am, there ye may be also. And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know." The christian's life; it is his journey along "the way," and a way it is in which many troubles, heart-troubles, are to be encountered. The christian's death; it is his welcome to our Father's house, to be with Jesus.

A traveler on a desert way, has for many a long day been pressing forward toward his journey's end. He has found springs of sweet water by the way-side, where he has slaked his thirst; and green spots, where for a little season he has rested his weary limbs—and yet, he has quitted them, passed them by, one after another, ever pressing onward toward his journey's end.

Why this? Because in spite of springs and green oases, his way is a desert way still, and his father's house lies beyond. Yes, and besides this, he has a precious treasure committed to his charge, and this desert has ever been the abiding-place of robbers; and all along the way, even amid the tall rank grass which waved by the spring-side, he has seen the bleaching bones of those, once pilgrims like himself, but who loitering, have been robbed and murdered. Many a long day has passed since first he took the pilgrim's staff, many a dificulty has he surmounted, many a danger has he braved, and all along, thoughts of his home, his father's house, have been his stay and solace. And now the desert way is almost past; his father's house, with doors wide open is just before him; his precious treasure is yet safe in his keeping; and blessed messengers, those "angels swift to do God's pleasure," whisper in his ear a glad welcome. To go forward, to enter that father's house, to be with Jesus, to be ever with him—this it is for the christian to die.

That death is always and necessarily an evil, is a dictum of that shallowest of all shallow philosophy, which would blot eternity from view, and degrade immortal man to a level with the brutes that perish. And in no circumstances does such a philosophy appear more contemptible than in the circumstances in which we this day stand. Cast out of account eternity, and the problem of the pestilence is a problem involved in inextricable confusion. A fool, aye, a thrice-sodden fool is he, who can this day say, "there is no God."

In the pestilence, God's hand has been upon us, and so sore has the chastening been, that but for the mercies mingled with his judgments and his sustaining grace, we had "fainted at his rebuke." But why has God thus chastened us? Surely He who "is love," and whose might and wisdom are such that "none can stay his hand, or say unto him, what doest thou?" cannot have chastened us thus by chance, nor without a purpose, and a purpose worthy of himself. Why has God thus chastened us? In the text, we have an answer, and an answer direct from heaven: "for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness."

Christian hearer, have not your own heart's utterances, as you have smarted under the rod, accorded with this voice from

heaven? The pestilence, from day to day, separated between "chiefest friends"—parents and children, husbands and wives, pastor and people, friends and neighbors. And as we, the living, hastily committed the dead to the earth; some, in the confident anticipation of a glorious resurrection—others, in whose death we had no hope—oh! how did the thought that for them our last word had been spoken, our last deed done, our last prayer uttered, oppress the soul? Seemed there not something then to whisper in our ear, Fool that thou hast been, to live so much for this present world, so forgetful of the great end and aim of life? And was there not the purpose formed, if God spares me, I will, by his grace, become more fully a "partaker of his holiness;" I will, henceforth, be more decidedly on the Lord's side; more earnest in prayer; more constant in effort; more habitually faithful and humble, sitting at Jesus' feet, that I may learn of him?

The "over-flowing scourge" has passed by, and you are this day numbered among the living. Christian hearer, God has spared you. In his good providence, you go out again into the world, to take part in its business; you enter the social circle, that you may there exert a mighty influence for good or for evil; you meet with God's people, in the sanctuary, in the Sabbath-school, in the prayer meeting. And now, will you turn again to the impracticable, the foolish, the wicked work—for such God's word declares it to be, and such God's spirit made you to feel it to be, while the pestilence was among us—the impracticable, the foolish, the wicked work, of attempting to serve, at once, both God and mammon? Christian parent, yet a parent, through God's mercy, in the midst of many left to weep as did Rachel, because their children "are not," shall the business of your life, henceforth, be to rear your children for this present world; to make them accomplished, that they may be admired by the gay and the thoughtless; to teach them to heap together the gold of earth, and set their hearts upon it; to climb to high station in society, prizing the honor which is from man above the honor which is from God? Was it for such a purpose God spared you? No. The witness of God's Spirit, in his word, and in your own hearts too, is, that you have been chastened, yet not destroyed, that you might be "partakers of his holiness."

I recollect, once, to have read an account of the battle of Waterloo, written by one who was a soldier in the British army on that occasion. A large portion of the British infantry were formed into hollow squares, and the fortunes of the day turned upon the preservation of those squares in their integrity. From time to time, one and another of them would be broken for a moment, by the French artillery or some furious cavalry charge; and then, the order would be heard "close up," and at once living men stepped forward to take the place of the fallen. And but for this, said he, we had lost the day. Christian brethren, we have, in this incident, a representation, at once, of our condition as a Church and of our duty. In our encounter with the pestilence, our ranks have been broken; many of those whose place was in the fore-front of the battle, have fallen; and now the order comes, "close up,"—the living must take the places of the dead—their places in the sanctuary, in the prayer-meeting, in the Sabbath-school, in the closet, in the family, in the world, if Christ's cause is to win the day. Oh, for God's Spirit, to teach us and enable us, each one, to meet fully and fairly the responsibilities of the day.

But many in this congregation, to-day, do not bear the name of Christ; make no profession of love or allegiance to him. The pestilence came, commissioned of God, to address itself to such, as well as to his professing people. And, as I stand here to-day, between you, the living, and the more than two thousand dead, who, within the last few months, have been buried on the outskirts of our city, methinks I can almost hear a voice from heaven uttering the solemn admonition, "Be ye also ready; for in such an hour as ye think not, the Son of Man cometh." Will you heed the admonition?

Do you say, It is not likely that another visitation of the pestilence, such as that from which our city has just suffered, will occur again for many years, perhaps not during the life-time of any one of us; and in a twelve months the business of the city will hardly shew a trace of the desolation which it wrought; I will, therefore, turn me again to the world, and dismiss, at least for the present, the serious thoughts which have for a time obtruded themselves upon me?

You may be—you probably are, correct in your anticipations

respecting the business of the city. You may be—you probably are, correct in your judgment respecting a recurrence of the pestilence. But is this the return you mean to make for God's long-suffering forbearance towards you? Is this the use you mean to make of the life which he has spared you? Is this a fulfillment of the vows you made in the hour of peril—vows unheard, it may be, of man, but heard and registered on high? Is not death just as certain, and may not death be to you just as near, in this time of general health, as in a time of pestilence? The mere circumstances in which death shall occur, are matters of very little moment. Whether a man shall die under the stroke of pestilence, when the city is so filled with the dead and the dying, that none shall follow his lifeless body to the grave, or at a time of general health, and when a long procession of weeping friends shall give him burial; whether a man shall die suddenly, and in great suffering of body, or by some lingering disease, his life fading away "as fades the light of even"—these, these, are but the trappings, the outward garniture of death. Death, in its reality, is the passage of an immortal being from a land radiant with gospel hope, and bordering close on heaven, to a land between which and heaven there is a gulf impassable—a land where God hath forgotten to be gracious. In this, its reality, death you must encounter. How late, how soon, God only knoweth. Death may be, even now, at your door. Living men, spared in mercy, whilst one was stricken down on your right hand and another on your left—you heard God's warning voice as he spake in the pestilence—oh, heed that voice; and to-day, even to-day, harden not your hearts.